

Capt. John Dobson, Southampton, Ont.

Interviewed by Wm. Wakeham and Richard Rathbun,

September 7, 1894.

*Experience*  
I have fished in this place all my life.

*history*  
I have been fishing here all of 35 years.

There were a number here before that, but it was not carried on very extensively. I have been fishing for myself for 35 years. In <sup>9</sup>

*g. boats history*  
1860 there were as many sail boats as now, I think. At Goderich there used to be as high as 25 boats at a time, and I have known them to be that many here. There would not be as

many boats 35 years ago. At that time there was a good market for fish. Fish were high-

*market*  
er at that time than I have ever seen them; that is, salt fish. We used to salt them at that time, as there was no way of transporting them. The railroad, I think, came here

in 1873 or 1874. I used to ship fish to God-  
erich by boat before that, and from there  
they went to Buffalo. Buffalo has had the  
fish from this region ever since I know of.

Take the lake between Kincardine and Cape  
Hurd, the principal fishery has been gill  
nets and seines, but seines are all done  
away with now. I do not know much about  
pound net fishing and never did anything at  
it. It has never been carried on around  
here. I think there was one put in and it  
was a failure, and there has been none since.

I have never heard of fyke nets around here.  
There is no commercial hook and line fishing.  
They fish a little just to eat, but you can-  
not catch anything to amount to anything.

The fishermen as a general thing, when they  
lay up, just quit altogether. The fish are  
not here to be caught in the winter. The  
seines were used on the Sable beach up here

Loc.  
q  
Seines

P.

fykes  
Hooks.

occupation

Fish in  
winter

Seines  
Loc.

until the last 2 years. I recollect of seines being used as long as I can remember, both for herring and whitefish. They would use a larger mesh seine for whitefish. Would use a larger mesh on the wings, but the bag would be the same for both. They would seine in the same places for both herring and whitefish. The herring and whitefish run together. The net would be 2 1/4 and 2 1/2 in the bunt, and in the wings it might be 5 inches. All the small herring would go right through the wings. They make it so they will, as they would be no use to them. The Indians used to have seines at the Fishing Islands. The Indians would catch fish to sell. They are just making a living out of it. I have seen lots of the whitefish that they took from the seines. They would take some small ones. I do not think the seining did the whitefish any good.

S.  
history  
herring  
N.Y.  
descrip.

Loc.  
herring  
N.Y.  
assoc.

mesh  
herring

Loc.

N.Y.

Small

S. herring  
to N.Y.

*9.  
tugs*

They have had tugs here for quite a number of years, about 7 years I think. There are 5 tugs fishing out of here. There has been 5 tugs out of here for the last 2 years, and before that I think there was only one. Up to 3 years ago there was only one tug. There is no other place where tugs belong between Kincardine and Cape Hurd. Before that time the fishing was by sail boats. The sail boats are getting less all the time. They are getting to using tugs. The fishing is getting so far away that it is impossible for the sail boats to reach them. There were more sail boats 15 years ago than there are now, and more than there were in the beginning. That is the time when there was about the greatest number of sail boats. They increased up to that time and they have gone down since. Most of the tugs belong to the Buffalo Company. There were at least 13

*boats**fewer now  
mon distant*



9. sail boats here 15 years ago. These boats that are here now do not fish here in the summer. There were only 5 boats fished here this summer. There has never been as many as 20 boats fished here. They used to come here about June and July. I have seen as high as 25 boats here at once. They used to come here that way in olden times, but now the fishing seems to be about the same all over for the fishing boats, and then there are not the boats to move around that there used to be. A lot of those men who had sail boats are using tugs now. We use 4 1/2 and 5 1/2 net, and 2 1/2-inch nets for herring. The trout net is 5 1/2, but I have used as high as 6-inch. The whitefish net is the principal one that is used. They are used right up until now from about April. They begin to use them as soon as the ice is out and fish them up until about the first of

descrip

Season

9.

September. They do not use them at all after that, as they are not strong enough.

*Describe.*

The twine is too fine and they will not stand it in the fall. The twine I am using now is the No.30, and the twine I use in the summer is No.50 and 60. You have to have a stronger and coarser twine during the stormy weather. They will use about 16 nets to a gang and have 4 gangs. Sometimes there will be half of them ashore. There are so many of them to handle you cannot take them all out at once; you have got to keep bringing them in and taking them out. They generally keep 3 in the water and one ashore. The tugs use about 36 nets to a gang and they have 5 gangs. They have 1 gang ashore and 4 in the water. The length of the whitefish nets, the net we generally use, is the No.50. The tugs have 100 leads and 9 feet apart. The sail boats use about 85 leads and they

*Describe*

4.  
are the same distance apart. The trout nets are not much more than half as long. They would not need much more than half the number of leads. The average depth of the trout net is 6 feet. They are about 15 meshes deep, and the others are 18 meshes deep. They will have but one gang of herring nets and they haul them every day. Each net has 50 corks 6 feet apart. They use about 1,000 yards of net to a boat.

*Herring g.  
rigs  
tune out  
seasip.*

I was fishing at Greenwich last fall for herring. I never caught any herring of any quantity before the first of November. At one time we used to catch them in October, and I have seen them catch them in September, but now we do not catch them until the first of November to any amount. I never bother with them in the spring. There is nobody does anything with herring until about the middle of October and until the middle of No-

*herring  
loc.  
seasip*

*herring**loc.*

vember. The herring grounds are just around the inside of the islands. You can catch them in 10 or 15 fathoms of water in the gill nets. You can catch them all along this shore both north and south of Southampton. The most of the fishing is done between here and the Cape. They do the most of it between Chiefs Point and up as far as Johnsons Harbor. In the Georgian Bay they do not pretend to fish herring at all to speak of. In the spring we go out in from 20 to 30 fathoms of water. Tugs go to deep water where we cannot go. The tugs fish as far as Nine-Fathom Bank. They will go as far north as Greenwich and tugs from Georgian Bay come down about as far as that. They will go south about west by south from here, nearly off Kincardine. They fish all along the big reef. I have fished on the big reef with a sail boat, but not of late

*Georgian Bay.**q.**Season  
loc.*

4. years. The sail boats fish out about 20 or 25 miles generally. We have gone as far as 45 miles, but since tugs started we have quit it. The sail boat fishing is mainly between Southampton and Cape Hurd, and if they fish far north toward Cape Hurd, they have a temporary station farther north. We used to go out 20 miles in the summer, but do not go out so far in the fall. We use a 5 1/2-inch mesh on the rocks in about 12 or 15 fathoms. Would use them as far up as Greenwich. The tugs use 5 1/2-inch mesh and they fish in about the same places as the sail boats. The 5 1/2-inch mesh is used in shallow water along the shore, and the 4 1/2-inch mesh in the deep water. The fish in the deep water are a different fish altogether. They are a smaller fish and never grow any larger. Those fish we catch in the 5 1/2-inch mesh we could not catch in a small-

mesh

Just  
var.  
loc.  
Season  
size

9.

er mesh at all. There is only a certain time of year we get those fish. We get trout in the 5 1/2-inch mesh. We get trout as high as 10 or 20 pounds. We would get nothing else, as the mesh is too big. In the other nets we catch trout all through the season. We do not catch the same kind of fish in the summer that we catch in the fall. They are a different species of fish. I can pick you 2 or 3 different kinds of trout. There are no different kinds of whitefish, however. Those fish we are catching now you cannot catch in the summer at all. The trout we catch now are more like the salt water salmon and the other is kind of white in flesh. There is not much difference in their shape. The salmon trout we catch now are black and the others are spotted. The small fish range from 2 1/2 to 3 pounds in weight. We do not get many small-

*trout -  
mesh.)**n.f.  
m.)*



er than 2 pounds, as they go right through the nets. Anything smaller than 2 pounds would be of no use to us. With the 4 1/2-inch mesh we have the best fishing in the spring. Sometimes we will be in 25 fathoms and sometimes 50 fathoms. We have no regular depth in the spring and no depth in the summer, but just shift around wherever we can find the fish. The tugs fish on the edge of the reefs all the season. They will fish there until the last of this month. There are very few whitefish to be had. We used to get them in about 15 fathoms. Never got them out in the middle of the lake, but always along the shore. Would get them on muddy bottom. Would not get them on hard bottom at all until they spawned late in the season, and then we could not fish for them. The whitefish are not 1/4 of the catch of fish. I have seen the time when I would get

9.  
Went

min. (sig)

9.  
mesh  
season  
loc.

9. f.  
loc.  
decrease  
season

all whitefish and not any trout. Anything outside of 30 fathoms you would not get any whitefish at all. I do not think the catch of whitefish now is more than 1/10 of the catch. I guess the biggest lift that was caught here this year I got myself, and I got about 900 pounds. The whitefish have certainly decreased, but I do not know the cause. It seems in one season they seemed to just light right out. That is 10 or 11 years ago. There would be splendid fishing before that. They seemed to go all at once. On Georgian Bay it is just the same. The boats used to catch from 25 to 30 tons and this year some of the boats have not caught 3 tons. There is no bark on the whitefish grounds here now. I do not think the sawdust has anything to do with the decrease. They never take any small whitefish in the herring nets. The seines took an enormous

back.

Sawdust

Herring g. net  
Small w/f.

Seine  
Small w/f.

*n.f.*  
*Trout abundant.*  
*n.f. decrease)*  
*Loc.*  
quantity of young whitefish when they were at it. They have destroyed a large amount of whitefish. I know there was a man here by the name of McKenzie, and the year before that he caught about 45 tons, and the next year he run in debt and cleared out, and that is about 10 or 11 years ago. I do not believe you will ever kill out the trout, but the whitefish we seem to have kind of killed them out. The trout are as abundant as ever. I had a lift yesterday of 388 pounds of trout, and that is a thing you do not get very often at this time of year in a 5 1/2-inch mesh. They have been going out on the reefs for years. In the spring I do not see as there is any difference in the inside grounds here. Of course, you fish them out, but they come back again, and next spring the fish will be as thick as ever.

*Herring decrease*  
There has been a decrease in the herring I

think. On those lower islands they do not catch anything like they used to. I believe, however, they shift around. At Tober Morey there was any amount of herring last fall. In the gill nets we do not get anything worth speaking of but herring, trout and whitefish. / There are no pickerel here. / We get no perch. Get no black bass, catfish or sturgeon. We get once in awhile a lawyer, but throw them away. Get no pike to speak of. Get no maskinonge. We get any amount of suckers and they are no use. We catch the moon-eyes in deep water about 80 or 90 fathoms. They are a very poor fish. I think I have seen 1 or 2 eels here up in this little lake connected with the big lake by the river. We have a man who boils the fish offal. They do not throw any in the lake. I think it is injurious to the trout to throw the offal in the lake. It spoils

9  
catch  
herring  
trout  
wallye  
perch  
bass  
cat  
sturgeon  
eels  
Eels  
maskin  
suckers  
moon-eyes  
Eels  
offal

*Sawmills*  
*Tannery*  
*Q.*  
*can*  
*tanning*  
*back.*

the fishing grounds. It will spoil the fishing grounds wherever they are fished if it is thrown on the grounds. I do not know of any places where the saw-mills would hurt the fishing, unless it is Sable River. I do not think the tannery does any harm. They do not throw anything in the river but the liquor. We tan our nets so dark because it preserves them. They will fish just as well light, but it preserves them. I would just as soon have them dark as any way. It will save the nets from molding. We tan our nets every month. There is no trouble with bark here. The trouble with bark is in the Georgian Bay. I never heard of it out in the middle of the lake.

#### REGULATIONS.

*Seines*  
*harmful*

I think the seines have been a big injury to us. I think they have destroyed a lot of small fish. You cannot draw a seine for

Trout  
Loc.  
habits

trout, as they are on the rocks where you cannot haul the seine. When the trout come on the rocks, they come on in a rush. I think the trout keep in bodies about the same as the whitefish do. There is one thing about the fall fishing of the trout, you cannot catch those fish any other time of the year only in the fall. They seem to live on top of the surface, and live on nothing but flies, and in the fall they will go down. You can troll in the summer and catch those trout, but now you cannot catch them. All trout do not spawn at the same time. They say they spawn sometime in November. I think the large salmon trout spawn in November. These trout on the reefs spawn at different times through the season. The tugs will get them sometimes about the first of August and in July with the spawn running right out of them. The whitefish spawn in

Spawning

N. J.  
Spawning



Herring  
Spawning  
hatching  
trout

November. The herring spawn in November al-<sup>the</sup>

so. I think a good hatchery is about as <sup>J.</sup>

good a thing as we can get. There were

about five million trout put in here this

summer. I do not think they ever planted

any before. There was trout spawn taken

from Wiarton last winter. If we fished in

November we would get more trout than we

would in October. When the whitefish were <sup>nt</sup>

plenty here, we got more in the summer than

any other time. Whitefish used to play all

around the islands between Chiefs Point and

Cape Hurd. We could not catch them on the

spawning grounds as we could in the summer

because we could not use as many nets on ac-

count of the weather. All the whitefish we

caught on the rocks did not amount to much.

But the seines used to scoop them in on the

sandy beaches. Last year was the first year <sup>Reg</sup>

they had a close season all through November.

Trout  
Season

W. f.  
Season

Loc.

Catching on  
Spawning  
grounds

Close  
Season W. f.

Close season

They used to have it begin November 10. I have paid licenses for 10 or 20 years. The only regulations when I began fishing was just the license and we could fish the whole year. We could take more trout in November and not so many whitefish. I do not suppose last winter you could buy 10 packages of whitefish in this village, and I guess it was the same on the other side. I think it is a very unjust thing that we should be niggered down here and the Americans do just as they like. As far as the market is concerned, it does not hurt us, but they are cleaning us out. I am the only man who ships his own fish here, and I do not sell my fish to the Buffalo Company, and it is a benefit to me to have the others sell their fish to the Buffalo Company as I have the Canadian market. The Americans have drained the fish out pretty well, but, of course,

*Formerly no restrictions*

*trout  
N.Y.  
season*

*N.Y.  
scarcely*

*unfair to  
have laws  
different on  
two sides.*

*markets*

*Influence of  
Am. on Can  
side.*

they have brought in the capital among us. If it were not for the American market, however, we could not ship the fish as the Canadian market could not consume it. Protection to the fish during the spawning season will certainly help them, and if both sides were alike I would not say a word. I can remember at one time when the fishing was better on the American side than it was on this side. It would be pretty hard to fish this lake out of trout. We could not do anything with a mesh smaller than 4 1/2-inch. I think that size is about right. Our herring fishery does not interfere with the whitefish. I do not think I ever saw 2 whitefish in a herring net in my life. They get them in the seine because they drag them in. We never get the small whitefish here. You can get them along sandy beaches, but we never get them in the herring nets. We never used

*Protect  
Spawning season*

*Am. side used  
to be best*

*Trout  
abund.*

*q.  
proper mesh*

*Herring q.  
w.f.*

*S.  
w.f.*

*Small w.f.  
etc.*

to get them in the old times. Whitefish and herring will run together. I have seen herring and whitefish running together. The

smallest size trout that should be marketed

is about 2 pounds. We can throw out the

small ones without any trouble. We never

get whitefish under 2 pounds. You take a

whitefish that weighs 1 1/2 pounds, and he

will go right through a 4 1/2-inch mesh. A

whitefish weighing 2 pounds will stick in it,

but a 1 1/2 pound will go right through. A

trout will live in the net a good deal longer

than a whitefish. I have had fish live

in a net until they cut themselves almost

in two, but they were caught around the middle,

and I have had them where they would

die inside of half an hour, when they were

caught around the gills and would drown. I

think the way the fishing is going there

would be more of a decrease than increase,

W. J.  
herring  
assoc.

Trout,  
min. size  
throwing out

W. J.  
size  
mesh

q.  
cond. fin

No. fisherman  
expects in  
abund.

even if everybody was allowed to fish and  
did not require a license. I think, however,  
there are too many men fishing now.

*Too many  
fishermen*

